



Dear Representative Luxenberg, Senator Moore, and members of the Housing Committee:

My name is Luke Melonakos-Harrison. I am a resident of New Haven, a renter, and a tenant union member.

I am testifying in support of SB 4, with amendments to **lower the cap to 2.5%, maintain the cap between tenants, and expand good cause eviction protection to all tenants.**

I know what the words “housing crisis” mean, because I’m from California.

I moved here for my education but also for two other reasons: to get the healthcare I needed as a trans person in a new and hopefully safe place, and to pay more affordable rent. The apartment I moved out of in San Diego in 2020 is for rent right now in 2023. But my partner and I are missing about \$2000 from the monthly income we would need to even apply for that apartment now.

I worked as a homeless outreach worker for 4 years. I escorted doctors into the bushes of our public parks to tend festering wounds caused by untreated diabetes and scabies. I visited wheelchair-bound human beings forced to sit in their own urine and feces for days at a time. I sat with young people and elderly women as they told me about the sexual assaults they endured on the streets. I spent two full years working the system to get my beloved friend into housing, only to then hold her hand as she died of a gangrene infection. A *gangrene* infection. Human beings are not meant to sleep on sidewalks. I have seen what happens when a society surrenders housing—a fundamental human need and human right—to the ruthless logic of investment portfolios. California enacted rent stabilization in 2020, far too late to benefit me or many tens of thousands of people who try to survive without shelter in the wealthiest country on earth, and with too much leeway and loopholes for rent hikes.

Connecticut is rapidly heading down the road of west coast homelessness, unless you act now. Valentine’s Day marked the highest number of eviction filings in the state since at least 2017, when the records went online. Governor Lamont said he “couldn’t believe it.” As an organizer for tenant dignity and tenant power in this state, I have no problem believing it. I see it firsthand every day. The number of children experiencing homelessness in Connecticut jumped 25% in one year. Members of the housing committee: this is happening on your watch. The public wonders whether you feel any of the urgency that we do.

We have built a movement in this state to **cap the rent**. 72% of registered voters agree that there should be a cap, and that it should be **2.5% annually**. There is a massive base of popular support for this policy, and that's because those of us who live and work here *can* believe those eviction and homelessness numbers. We see it, and we feel the threat of it hanging over our heads. We are handing you an opportunity to intervene in the vicious cycle of financialized housing that we're enduring. We are asking you to take a stand against the deep pocket investors who are taking control of our housing stock and displacing the diverse and beautiful people who live, study, work, and dream of a future here. I urge you to pass this bill with the recommended amendments, and to do so with pride.

Sincerely,
Luke Melonakos-Harrison
New Haven, CT